

## **Police aim for networking with the public Law officials use Nixle to keep citizens informed**

### **Nixle – For Law Enforcement to Keep the Citizens Informed**

---

Whenever Malori Evans gets a text message or an e-mail, there is a chance that it might be from the police.

"I get stuff from them all the time. I actually got two or three alerts to my cell today," Evans said Thursday while scrolling through the incoming messages on her BlackBerry. "It's just a good way to feel like you know what's going on. I think a lot of people feel unsafe because they feel like the cops are lying to them or hiding stuff. I don't have that feeling."

The service Evans uses to stay informed is Nixle, a Web-based system launched locally in 2009 that warns local residents about crashes, fugitives, road restrictions, hazardous weather and other issues.

With thousands of new Purdue University students calling Tippecanoe County home for the next few years starting today, local law enforcement agencies are re-educating people about Nixle and several other free services designed to keep citizens in the loop quickly and conveniently.

According to West Lafayette Police Chief Jason Dombkowski, Nixle is a service that his officers use on a regular basis. His department is not alone.

Currently, police departments, fire departments and emergency management services in Tippecanoe and all of its surrounding counties are enrolled in Nixle.

"It's pretty convenient, and it's totally free for us, and for residents," said Dombkowski. "The exact numbers aren't on hand, but it's growing. I know we have hundreds of people signed up for the service now."

Tippecanoe County Sheriff Tracy Brown said dispatchers and, in some cases, emergency officials right on the scene can send messages via computers and personal data devices. "The possibilities are endless," he said.

Evans said she signed up for the service immediately and made sure to get her friends and family to do the same.

"I'm from Chicago, and I can only imagine how much better I would have felt if I had something like this when I was growing up," she said. "I've got kids, and if there is something going on they should stay away from, it's great to get the warning."

For Frankfort's Samuel Dever, the program shows how important it is for police and emergency officials to have an online presence.

"This is the Facebook era, so everyone's gotta be online. I used it during the storms we had this summer, and it was a life saver," he said. "I lost power once, but I still got the road closure info since my laptop was charged up. It was cool."

### **WETIP ANONYMOUS HOTLINE – For Citizens to Assist Law Enforcement**

---

While Nixle is used to get information to residents, its counterpart is the anonymous WeTip hotline.

WeTip, which has been used nationwide since 1972, became active locally in 2008 as part of Project Safe Neighborhoods, an anti-crime and anti-gang initiative through the prosecutor's office.

County Prosecutor Pat Harrington said the program carries a \$10,000 annual fee for departments to use, and is funded through the prosecutor's office with the help of grant money.

"This costs nothing for our local law enforcement agencies, and no tax dollars are used for this service," he said.

Harrington said the motivation to bring WeTip to Tippecanoe County came from discussions with numerous focus groups after he first became prosecutor.

"What we learned from those discussions is that people in Tippecanoe County wanted to be more involved and they wanted to remain anonymous when reporting illegal activity," he said. "We are now the number one WeTip community in the nation. We were overwhelmed by the response to it."

Schools, neighborhood groups and several local community centers also pass out information about the hotline. Harrington said Tippecanoe County's advertising of the service has been so aggressive that it began attracting crime reports from outside the county.

To date, Harrington said there have been 2,784 tips made to WeTip, 1,662 of which are for reports in Tippecanoe County.

Michelle Emily said she often sees posters for WeTip around Lafayette.

"I've never called it, but I know I can without being afraid that someone is going to know I told on them," she said. "That's my fear. I'm get worried that if I report a violent crime, it may one day come back to me."

Harrington said with WeTip, there is no chance of anyone finding out who made the anonymous tip.

Calls placed to WeTip are not answered locally. They are handled by a service in California that informs people not to give their name as soon as they answer.

Dombkowski said although calls go out of state, there is little to no delay for the California service to forward information to local dispatchers.

If a caller wants a reward to the tip they provide, they are assigned a code name and number that can be used to redeem money orders that are made out to cash.

#### Additional Facts - Signing up

- To sign up for the Nixle alert system, go online to [www.nixle.com](http://www.nixle.com) and follow the instructions.
  - People can choose to receive information from multiple locations sent to their e-mail address, cell phone or both.
  - The service is free, but regular text messaging fees associated with your wireless apply.
- To report crime activity anonymously, call the WeTip hot line at (800) 782-7463, or (800) 78-CRIME.